The World Is Not Overpopulated

By Alex B. Berezow
July 20, 2011

An opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times* declared the world to be overpopulated and even compared humanity to a cancerous growth. This reasoning is not only disturbing, but is almost certainly incorrect, as well.

The world, indeed, has a lot of people. By the end of 2011, there will be nearly 7 billion people living on the planet. But population growth rates will not sustain at those levels. An analysis by *The Economist* describes how each subsequent billion will take longer and longer to achieve, until population growth eventually plateaus at around 9 billion people by 2050.

A 2003 assessment by the United Nations concurs. The UN projects, under its medium-growth scenario, that the human population will remain relatively stable at 9 billion until the year 2300.

The reason is that birth rates are naturally falling around the world. The current growth in world population exceeds the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman, but there are good reasons to believe that growth will slow down in the future. As countries become more technologically and economically advanced, people naturally choose to have fewer children. Also, there is a link between increasing female education and a declining birth rate.

Europe is the poster child for this phenomenon, where the total fertility rate is below 2.1 in all 27 EU nations. The problem is so bad in Russia, which may shrink by 25 million people in the next 40 years, that demographers are referring to a population crisis. This will put an enormous strain on Russia's economy as the government struggles to care for its aging population.

The authors also contend that "reproductive freedom" benefits all of humanity. But does it? Research shows that families around the world, particularly in Asia, selectively abort female infants. This "gendercide" distorts natural male-female ratios in the population. In some provinces in China, the ratio is perversely skewed in favor of boys, with 130 male births for every 100 female births. Obviously, this will have dire consequences for society.

If population poses a problem, it is likely due to distribution, not to growth. After all, only so many people can fit on the coasts of China, India, and the United States. There are many wide-open spaces for the population to expand. The trick will be to figure out a way to incentivize responsible growth, not to discourage it entirely.

Finally, the authors claim that poverty results from overpopulation. While this might be partially correct, many other factors contribute to poverty. China, with a population of approximately 1.3 billion, has entered a period of skyrocketing economic growth. India, with a similarly sized populace, is also slowly working its way out of poverty.

Instead of focusing on controlling population growth, a better way to tackle poverty is to help solve humanity's basic problems. Infectious disease, corrupt governance, and lack of access to global markets are Africa's biggest problems. When these devastating issues are corrected, African countries could experience rapid economic growth in the same way as did the Asian Tigers.

When the world becomes a more prosperous place, the "problem" of population growth will largely take care of itself.

Alex B. Berezow is the editor of RealClearScience. He holds a Ph.D. in microbiology.

Related Topics: Population Growth

COMMENTS

ezoic

report this ad